

By STUART EARP Wycombe Wanderers 1, Barking 0

A SINGLE goal from Howard Kennedy was just enough for Wycombe Wanderers to take the three points at stake against Barking in Saturday's Isthmian League encounter at Loakes Park. But although the Blues jump up to third place in the Premier Division, there was once again little satisfaction from their success.

I always feel a slight tinge of guilt criticising a side that has lost only five games in 18 league outings. But even the most ardent supporter must concede that Wanderers are some way below the standard they set themselves in recent years. The exciting one-touch football and flowing moves from defence to attack are just not there any more. Instead the build up is often slow and laborious.

Occasionally one sees flashes of the past in some moves. Mick Holifield, who returned to the side after a fortnight's absence, got into top gear a couple of times but Wycombe's same old problem of slack control inevitably baulked their progress. Derek Harris, who started so brightly a few weeks ago, was most disappointing as was Tony Horseman who finished his contribution by missing a golden chance of a second goal.

That would have been far too harsh on poor Barking, whom many thought deserved at least a share of the spoils. They were unlucky to hit the woodwork, had a goal disallowed and also found Peter Spittle in great form between the sticks.

Despite one or two moments of excitement, however, the majority of this game was dull. Mistakes were rife on both sides and neither was good enough to dominate events. The entertainment was further ruined by referee Prevett who appeared to delight in halting the game. The quite unnecessary gesticulations for goalkicks brought plenty of noise from the crowd behind the goal which Mr Prevett seemed to enjoy enormously, I didn't.

Farouk Quraishi must have felt a little aggrieved to be dropped after a useful performance at Southall but his replacement, Holifield, was soon in action with two surging runs in the first five minutes. Wycombe, in fact, looked good and stroked the ball about confidently without creating too much danger to the Barking goal.

ALARMING

As the half progressed, however, so the game deteriorated with Wanderers unable to break cleanly through a resilient defence. Barking grew in confidence and finished much the stronger side. They deserved a goal in the 41st minute when Bryn Key cut inside on the edge of the box and found an alarming amount of space. His drive beat Spittle but cannoned against the underside of the bar and although the giant Peter Burton headed in the rebound, he had been offside when Key struck his shot earlier.

Eight minutes before the break Bob Davies had to leave the field with a muscle pull which meant that Graham Mackenzie was switched to right back to accommodate Roger Day in midfield.

There was little improvement in the second half where Wycombe again started promisingly but faded. There seemed a shortage of ideas in midfield where the ball was frequently played backwards and across the pitch without ever threatening the Barking defence.

A shot from Terry Dibble almost surprised Spittle in the 55th minute but it was Wanderers who achieved the

vital breakthrough after 62 minutes. Horseman found Holifield on the top flank and his awkward cross was missed by two defenders. Kennedy made no such mistake and beat Nick Markwich with a cracking drive from 15 yards.

GOLDEN CHANCE

The goal seemed to instill some confidence into the Blues with Steve Vass and Mackenzie both finding time to join the attacks on the wings. This gave Wycombe more width but there were few clear chances created. It was just when Wanderers were upfield that Barking wasted a golden chance to equalise. Ex-Wycombe man Tony Brothers caught the back four square with a through ball to Key who ignored the unmarked Burton and sent in a shot which Spittle did well to turn around an upright.

Thus encouraged, Barking put the home defence under a good deal of pressure but fine work by Alan Phillips and Vass kept them out and it was Wanderers who had the final chance of the game when Vass broke out of defence and sent a glorious ball to Horseman. With a clear route to goal 'Bodger' looked odds-on to score but as Markwich came out, he miscued his shot well wide.

Fortunately for Wycombe, Horseman's mistake mattered little and they held out comfortably for the last few minutes.

WYCOMBE: P. Spittle; R. Davies (sub R. Day 38 mins), K. Mead, A. Phillips, S. Vass; G. Mackenzie, H. Kennedy, M. Holifield; A. Horseman, D. Harris, D. Evans.

BARKING: N. Markwick; G. Hailey, K. Barratt, G. Twidell, R. Makin; N. Ashford, A. Brothers, G. Anderson; T. Dibble, P. Burton, B. Key. Sub T. Sharpe (not used).

Half-time: 0-0. Goalscorer, Kennedy (62).

Referee: D. Prevett (Malden).
Attendance: 1,200.

Injury rules out Davies

BOB DAVIES, injured in Wycombe Wanderers' 1-0 win over Barking on Saturday, is likely to be out for as long as three weeks with a pulled calf muscle. Fortunately, Paul Birdseye is fit again and is a ready-made replacement for the Blues match against Staines tonight (Tuesday) in the Isthmian League Premier Division at Loakes Park.

Birdseye, who suffered a back injury at Enfield, has missed two games but will resume his best role of right back tonight. Davies, however, will be greatly missed as he has become one of Wycombe's most consistent defenders this season.

Staines come to Loakes Park in search of revenge after a 3-1 home defeat by Wanderers in September. For Wycombe, it was a particularly important result after their 2-0 home defeat at the hands of Tooting. Roger Day and Farouk Quraishi both made their debuts but are unlikely to be in action tonight as Graham Mackenzie and Howard Kennedy have shown improved form lately.

That 3-1 defeat was only Staines' second reverse of the season in the league, the other coming at Enfield where they lost 2-1. They have also recorded useful victories over Tooting and Leatherhead plus the double over Southall.

Recently, however, they have struggled to find their form as Saturday's goalless draw at home to Bishop's Stortford indicates. The point was only Stortford's fourth in 19 games.

Staines should have their talented coloured forward Eggie James back in the side after a month's absence through business. Defender John Love should also return after injury which means that Staines will be at full strength.

Wycombe, despite wins over Southall and Barking recently, will have to be at their best to take three points.